

Interpreting Political Trust after the Aceh Conflict

Abstract

This article examines the limits of obedience to the ulil amri as a basis for the ethical evaluation of the transformation of authority in the Aceh peace. The problem lies in the tendency to equate the duty of obedience with the impunity of the ruler or, conversely, to treat injustice as an automatic justification for armed resistance. Through qualitative document analysis and integrative synthesis, the study reads QS al-Nisā' [4]:58–59 across five Sunni exegeses and then brings these readings into dialogue with the Helsinki MoU, the Law on the Governing of Aceh, peace research, and documentation of victims' rights. Bangsamoro and Northern Ireland serve as limited comparators regarding the relationship between political accommodation and accountability. The findings show that refusal to obey a sinful command, moral assessment of governance, and the act of replacing those in power are matters that must be distinguished. The exegetical tradition examined upholds the obligations of trust (amanah) and justice while remaining cautious about contests over power. In the case of Aceh, the widening of political participation and the monitoring of security altered the way the conflict was managed, but did not automatically resolve tensions over authority, inequalities in citizens' access, and victims' claims. The article offers a framework of post-accommodation accountability that distinguishes norms, institutional design, and implementation, and that locates the accountability of power in both the state and local elites. Its contribution is a reconstruction of contemporary political ethics grounded in exegetical reading, without claiming that any particular interpretation gave rise to the Helsinki peace.

Keywords: ulil amri; Qur'anic exegesis; Aceh peace; accountability; transitional justice.

Authors:

Muris Muhammad Syah^{1*}

¹ *International Islamic university of Islamabad, Pakistan*

* Corresponding author:

E-mail:

muris.msudoo1648@student.iiu.edu.pk

Muyasir²

² *Universitas Islam Negeri Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh, Indonesia*

E-mail: muyasirelshirazy@gmail.com

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Introduction

The Aceh peace presents a problem of authority more intricate than a mere shift in the relationship between government and rebels. The Helsinki agreement of 15 August 2005 opened the way for the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) to participate in governance within the Republic of Indonesia. Yet recognition of a former party to the conflict did not answer how its power, once it had gained political access, was to be held accountable to citizens. Michelle Ann Miller's historical reading situates the conflict within the interplay of identity, central policy, resources, and violence; Edward Aspinall's study of elite bargains shows that stabilization can proceed alongside the persistence of the material interests of those who hold power.¹ What therefore needs explaining is not merely who is entitled to be obeyed, but how the demand for obedience is bounded once an actor that once opposed the state becomes part of public authority. This shift in political standing makes Aceh a case relevant to bringing the ethics of power in Qur'anic exegesis into dialogue with peace analysis.

QS al-Nisā' [4]:59 commands obedience to God, the Messenger, and the ulil amri, while also commanding that disputes be referred back to God and the Messenger. The preceding verse commands the discharge of trusts and just judgment. The relationship between the two verses permits a reading concerning the responsibility of the ruler, but it does not license the researcher to elide the distinction between criticism, the refusal of particular commands, and the removal of power. Ibn Kathīr, for instance, records the limitation of obedience to what is right (ma'rūf) together with reports that stress the preservation of the community (jamā'ah) and restraint upon opposition to the ruler.² If only the limitation of obedience is cited, the exegetical tradition will appear more permissive toward rebellion than the text being read. If only the demand for order is cited, the ruler's obligations and the limits of his commands disappear. Precision of attribution is therefore part of the theoretical problem of this article, not merely a technical matter of citation.

Scholarship on the ulil amri in Aceh does not rest entirely on normative discussion. Analiansyah interviewed ten dayah teungku in Aceh Besar and found variation in the understanding of ulil amri as well as differing attitudes toward the legal products of government. His discussion of professional zakat and marriage registration shows that recognition of authority does not always yield uniform acceptance of its regulations.³ That finding matters because it forestalls the assumption that a single doctrine of obedience directly represents all of Acehnese society. The object of that study, however, is the

¹ Michelle Ann Miller, "The Conflict in Aceh: Context, Precursors and Catalysts," *Accord 20* (2008), online edition, section on the historical account of the conflict, <https://www.c-r.org/accord/aceh-indonesia/conflict-aceh-context-precursors-and-catalysts>; Edward Aspinall, *Elite Bargains and Political Deals Project: Indonesia (Aceh) Case Study* (Stabilisation Unit, February 2018), "Executive Summary", https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5c19112c40f0b60bc4029ceo/Indonesia_case_study.pdf.

² Ismā'īl ibn 'Umar Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'azīm*, King Saud University electronic text, exegesis of QS al-Nisā' [4]:59, <https://quran.ksu.edu.sa/tafseer/katheer/sura4-aya59.html>.

³ Analiansyah, "Ulil Amri and Kekuatan Produk Hukumnya (Kajian terhadap Perspektif Teungku Dayah Salafi Aceh Besar)," *Analisa* 21, no. 2 (2014), 268, 274–277, <https://doi.org/10.18784/analisa.v21i02.20>.

conception and reception of regulation within a particular set of informants, not the relationship among the limits of obedience, the design of peace, and accountability after the integration of former rebels. This article addresses the latter relationship. It does not displace reception studies and does not extrapolate the findings from ten informants into an explanation of the motives of the Helsinki negotiators.

The literature on the Aceh peace supplies empirical questions that can sharpen that normative reading. Aspinall questions the relationship between the success of the agreement and the limits of justice; Lina Frödin distinguishes the needs of reintegration from the recovery of victims; Suraiya Kamaruzzaman shows that women's contributions were disproportionate to their access to the formal process.⁴ All three demonstrate that the cessation of hostilities, the accommodation of armed actors, and the fulfillment of citizens' rights are achievements that may advance at different speeds. This literature need not be given religious justification to be valid. Rather, it provides a test of an overly facile use of the language of trust and justice: moral claims about authority lose their edge if they cannot distinguish real institutional change from promises still pending or from a limited distribution of benefits.

This problem also extends beyond Aceh. The study by Rory O'Connell, Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, and Lina Malagón on Northern Ireland, based on documents and interviews with twenty civil-society leaders, shows the distance between changes in political institutions and the realization of promised social transformation. The evaluation of the European Union's engagement in Mindanao by Bunafsha Gulakova and Ahmed Harris R. Pangcoga reveals weaknesses in outcome indicators as well as concern for groups underrepresented in peace programs.⁵ Such comparison is used to sharpen the categories of analysis, not to assert that the history, religion, or constitutional structure of the three regions is the same. The pertinent point of convergence is the problem of accountability after political compromise. Indeed, the differences among the regions allow the researcher to examine whether a given argument depends on the specificity of Sunni exegesis or points to an institutional problem that also arises elsewhere.

⁴ Edward Aspinall, *Peace without Justice? The Helsinki Peace Process in Aceh* (Geneva: Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, 2008), 9–13, <https://hdcentre.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/56JusticeAcehfinalrevJUNEO8-May-2008.pdf>; Lina Frödin, "The Challenges of Reintegration in Aceh," *Accord 20* (2008), online edition, section on reintegration, <https://www.c-r.org/accord/aceh-indonesia/challenges-reintegration-aceh>; Suraiya Kamaruzzaman, "Agents for Change: The Roles of Women in Aceh's Peace Process," *Accord 20* (2008), online edition, section on the role of women, <https://www.c-r.org/accord/aceh-indonesia/agents-change-roles-women-acehs-peace-process>.

⁵ Rory O'Connell, Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, and Lina Malagón, "The Belfast/Good Friday Agreement and Transformative Change: Promise, Power and Solidarity," *Israel Law Review* 57, no. 1 (2024), section 1, 3–4, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021223723000031>; Bunafsha Gulakova and Ahmed Harris R. Pangcoga, *Evaluation of EU's Engagement in Mindanao from 2017–2020 under IcSP*, Final Report (Rotterdam: ECORYS Consortium, 2023), 32–36, https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/document/download/c5e3ecf5-6c85-4604-b294-4601ad910d5d_en?filename=evaluation-report-2023-e-3678-philippines-redacted_en.pdf.

Against this background, the article poses a single research question: how can the limits of obedience to the *ulil amri*, as read in QS al-Nisā' [4]:58–59, be formulated into a framework for evaluating the accountability of the Aceh peace after the political accommodation of GAM? Its central argument is that limited obedience furnishes a basis for criticizing the actions of those in power, but that its translation into peace governance requires institutional reasoning not fully available in the verse or its exegesis. The article's contribution lies in a framework of post-accommodation accountability: political recognition of former parties to a conflict must be followed by scrutiny of their obligations toward citizens, including groups that hold no armed bargaining power. This framework distinguishes three levels of demonstration—the interpreted norm, the obligation formulated in documents, and the implementation shown by research. That separation keeps the relationship between exegesis and the Aceh case argumentative without turning ethical congruence into a claim of cause and effect.

Method

The study employs qualitative document analysis with integrative synthesis. Document analysis is used to examine who produced a text, for what interest, which parts support a given claim, and the limitations of the evidence offered. Integrative synthesis brings together different research traditions in order to construct conceptual relationships rather than to measure the magnitude of a variable's effect.⁶ The selection of sources is purposive and follows relevance to a single research question. Searching was conducted by title, author, verse, and document name; citation chasing was used to locate examinable texts. A source was included when its identity was traceable, when the substantive portion supporting a claim could be opened and read, and when the type of evidence could be determined. Abstracts, search snippets, and other parties' bibliographies were not used as substitutes for reading the substantive portion of a cited source.

The corpus comprises 31 references: five works of exegesis at the relevant verse entries; two hadith collections for reports on the limitation of obedience and the oath of allegiance (*bay'ah*); four agreement or legal documents; and twenty supporting studies, analyses, and reports, including two methodological references. The text of the Qur'an is cited by *sūrah* and verse number and is not counted as an additional item to meet the reference total. The five exegeses read are those of al-Ṭabarī, al-Qurṭubī, al-Baghawī, Ibn Kathīr, and al-Sa'dī in the electronic texts of King Saud University. This selection accommodates variation in emphasis—on transmitted reports, on law, and on concise presentation—rather than representing the entire exegetical tradition. The Aceh documents center on the Helsinki MoU and the original text of Law No. 11 of 2006. The post-peace

⁶ Glenn A. Bowen, "Document Analysis as a Qualitative Research Method," *Qualitative Research Journal* 9, no. 2 (2009), 27–34, <https://doi.org/10.3316/QRJ0902027>; Hannah Snyder, "Literature Review as a Research Methodology: An Overview and Guidelines," *Journal of Business Research* 104 (2019), 334–336, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2019.07.039>.

literature is read according to its date of publication; the 2024 plain guide to the findings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (KKR) is used with its editorial status made explicit. The search cutoff is 18 September 2026.

The units of analysis are interpretive propositions, documentary provisions, and research findings relating to authority. Reading proceeds through four steps: distinguishing views transmitted by the exegete from those he adopts as his own; marking trust (*amanah*), justice, the limits of command, and the management of disputes; comparing the promises of the agreement with legal formulations and evidence of implementation; and then testing those explanations against Bangsamoro and Northern Ireland. Evidence that complicates the argument is deliberately retained—especially reports on the preservation of order, divergences among the negotiators' perspectives, the existence of KKR progress, and the limits of civic inclusion. Normative categories are not coded as empirical outcomes: the existence of a provision is not counted as the fulfillment of a right. This study conducts no interviews, no attitude measurement, and no audit of the whole of Aceh policy, and it makes no claim of intercoder reliability. Traceability is maintained through footnotes with locators—verse, article, page, or section—together with a register of sources that explains the limits of their use.

Results

Al-Ṭabarī's reading of QS 4:58 places trust (*amanah*) within the concrete relationship between the ruler and the rights entrusted to him. In his concluding remarks he speaks of the rights, property, and receipts that lie in the hands of those who administer the affairs of the Muslims, and of the prohibition against disposing of them improperly. When reading QS 4:59, he records several identifications of the *ulil amri* but chooses rulers and holders of governance as the stronger view, citing reports concerning obedience.⁷ Accordingly, the diversity of the reports cannot be taken directly as evidence that al-Ṭabarī rejects the authority of government or proposes a system of democratic oversight. The more measured finding is that his interpretive choice regarding rulers stands together with the obligation to administer the rights of the people and to act justly. Analytically, this allows the actions of government to be assessed according to its responsibilities, without first assuming that every moral failure nullifies its entire legal standing.

Al-Qurṭubī clarifies the relationship between the two verses by discussing the ruler's obligation in the verse of trust and the people's obligation in the verse of obedience. He includes interpretations of the *ulil amri* as both rulers and the learned, alongside a number of reports that place political order in a strong position. In the same discussion, he cites the limitation of obedience to matters that are not sinful and continues to distinguish

⁷ Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān 'an ta'wīl āy al-Qur'ān*, King Saud University electronic text, exegesis of QS al-Nisā' [4]:58–59, exegesis of QS 4:58–59, the passage “qāla Abū Ja'far,” <https://quran.ksu.edu.sa/tafseer/tabary/sura4-aya59.html>.

cooperation in what is right from following a wrongful command.⁸ This arrangement of the argument does not yield a modern political contract with an automatic mechanism for revoking a mandate. Yet neither does it abolish assessment of the content of a command. That difference matters: one may acknowledge the existence of government and the need for social order while refusing particular actions. A responsible framework of assessment must retain both elements, so that the demand for stability does not become a justification for every policy, and criticism of policy is not invariably read as a rejection of the existence of authority.

Al-Baghawī records a report attributed to ‘Alī on the imam's obligation to judge according to God's ordinances and to discharge trusts, followed by the people's obligation to hear and obey. He also cites a report on obedience in circumstances both liked and disliked, with an exception where one is commanded to sin. Another report he includes joins the prohibition against wresting authority from its holder with the obligation to speak the truth.⁹ What can be concluded from this arrangement of texts is the presence of a relationship among the ruler's duty, the people's obedience, and a moral courage that need not take the form of seizing power. This study treats those reports as part of al-Baghawī's exegetical argument; it does not claim to have independently verified their entire chains of transmission. That distinction forestalls two attributive leaps at once: treating every report as the exegete's personal opinion, and treating every citation in the work as the result of hadith verification carried out by this study.

In Ibn Kathīr, the limits of obedience appear clearly through the account of the commander who ordered his troops to enter a fire. That report can also be examined in Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, hadith 7257, which places obedience within what is right (ma'rūf). Ibn Kathīr, however, also presents a report on the oath of allegiance that forbids opposition to the holder of power, with strictly formulated exceptions; a similar text appears in Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, hadith 1709h.¹⁰ For that reason, the refusal of a sinful command, the moral evaluation of leadership, and the act of replacing a ruler cannot be treated as one and the same problem. The first report explains the limit of the object of obedience; the second concerns conflict over authority. This article does not use the exception in the allegiance report to assign a theological label to the state, GAM, or the government of Aceh. Its function in the analysis is to show that the proof-text limiting obedience is not sufficient to establish a blanket justification for armed struggle or territorial secession.

Al-Sa'dī includes rulers, holders of governance, and those who issue fatwas within the discussion of the ulil amri. Obedience is declared important for the affairs of religion and

⁸ Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Qurṭubī, *Al-Jāmi' li-aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, King Saud University electronic text, exegesis of QS al-Nisā' [4]:58–59, exegesis of QS 4:59, first and second discussions, <https://quran.ksu.edu.sa/tafseer/qortobi/sura4-aya59.html>.

⁹ Al-Ḥusayn ibn Mas'ūd al-Baghawī, *Ma'ālim al-tanzīl*, King Saud University electronic text, exegesis of QS al-Nisā' [4]:59, <https://quran.ksu.edu.sa/tafseer/baghawiy/sura4-aya59.html>.

¹⁰ Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl al-Bukhārī, Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, Kitāb Akhbār al-āḥād, hadith 7257, Sunnah.com, <https://sunnah.com/bukhari:7257>; Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj, Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, Kitāb al-Imārah, hadith 1709h, Sunnah.com, <https://sunnah.com/muslim:1709h>.

the world, but is commanded on condition that it not follow sin. He links that condition to the non-repetition of the verb of obedience before ulil amri, using the tentative expression *la'alla* rather than asserting that grammar alone settles the entire political question.¹¹ This finding corrects a reading that turns a linguistic observation into sole evidence of popular sovereignty or a right to overthrow the government. A stronger argument is built from the relationship among the clauses of the verse, the reports employed, and the way the exegete limits human commands. At this level, the corpus reveals a point of convergence on the limits of obedience together with variation in emphasis on the subject of authority. That convergence suffices to criticize claims of unlimited obedience, but it does not yet supply a constitutional design, an electoral system, or a distribution of central-regional authority.

The command to refer disputes back to God and the Messenger likewise requires interpretive delimitation. Ibn Kathīr explains it as referring matters to the Book and the Sunnah; al-Baghawī mentions *ijtihād* where a direct ruling is not found. Both speak within the horizon of religious reasoning; they do not describe a constitutional court, an international monitor, or an administrative consultation procedure.¹² The analytical consequence is the obligation to distinguish the basis of assessment from its institutional form. Testing decisions through law, examinable reasons, and a forum for disputes may be proposed as a contemporary reconstruction, but it must be acknowledged as the researcher's own work of reasoning. Table 1 summarizes those limits of inference. It does not fuse the five exegetes into a single political theory; it shows the elements that can be carried into the evaluation of Aceh and those that cannot be claimed as the direct meaning of the text.

Table 1. Limits of inference from the exegetical corpus

Source	Textual finding	Limit of the conclusion
Al-Ṭabarī	Chooses the ruler as ulil amri; trust encompasses the rights of the people.	The diversity of reports is not a rejection of government.
Al-Qurṭubī	Obligations of ruler and people; the limit of sin; concern for order.	Criticism of a command is not identical to the removal of power.
Al-Baghawī	Trust, obedience, speaking the truth, and referral and <i>ijtihād</i> .	The reports cited do not automatically become a modern contract theory.
Ibn Kathīr	Obedience within what is right, together with limits on contests over power.	Refusal of a command does not automatically justify rebellion.
Al-Sa'dī	Conditional obedience; the grammatical explanation is tentative.	Insufficient to conclude any particular constitutional form.

Source: the authors' reading of the references described in the relevant sections.

¹¹ 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Nāṣir al-Sa'dī, *Taysīr al-karīm al-raḥmān fī tafsīr kalām al-mannān*, King Saud University electronic text, exegesis of QS al-Nisā' [4]:59, <https://quran.ksu.edu.sa/tafseer/saadi/sura4-aya59.html>.

¹² Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'azīm*, exegesis of QS 4:59, concluding section; al-Baghawī, *Ma'ālim al-tanzīl*, exegesis of QS 4:59, concluding section.

Changes of authority in the Aceh peace documents

When carried over to Aceh, the exegetical findings first require a historical explanation that is not reduced to a judgment of piety. The background of the conflict set out by Miller does not treat all of GAM's demands as derivations of a single religious doctrine. Even official state documents acknowledge a problem in the conduct of government: recital (d) of the Law on the Governing of Aceh refers to welfare, justice, advancement, and the protection of human rights that had not been fully realized.¹³ The need to evaluate power thus does not stem solely from the narrative of those who opposed the state. That legal acknowledgment does not establish that all acts of resistance were right, just as the existence of rebellion does not abolish the state's obligations toward its citizens. For this analysis, those obligations are a more apt point of entry than treating the label of rebel as the answer to every question raised by the conflict. Explaining historical causes and assessing the manner of waging war remain two distinct tasks.

The negotiators' testimony shows that Helsinki was the outcome of a political compromise that worked through openings, offers, and shifts in the limits of demands. Hamid Awaluddin stresses the clarity of the government's commitment and the political support for peace; M. Nur Djuli and Nurdin Abdul Rahman stress the significance of self-government and access to a local party for GAM.¹⁴ Both sources are valuable because they come from participants, yet their positions also bound their perspectives. Read together, they reveal a shift from a dispute over political status toward an arrangement acceptable to the negotiating parties. There is no basis in those sources to claim that the agreement arose because the parties accepted a particular interpretation of QS 4:59. The relationship to exegesis in this article is evaluative: the shift toward a political process can be assessed against the demands of trust and the limits of power, without rewriting the history of the negotiations as a direct application of the doctrine of ulil amri.

The Helsinki document pairs political openings with changes in security. Access to a local party under point 1.2.1 provides a channel of struggle through political competition; the arrangements for disarmament and the withdrawal of non-organic troops reduce the process's dependence on armed superiority. The Law on the Governing of Aceh then supplies provisions for the formation of local parties in Article 75. As for early implementation, Kirsten E. Schulze explains the role of the Aceh Monitoring Mission in

¹³ Miller, "The Conflict in Aceh", account of the context of the conflict; Republic of Indonesia, Law No. 11 of 2006 on the Governing of Aceh, State Gazette of the Republic of Indonesia 2006 No. 62, Supplement No. 4633, recital (d), <https://peraturan.bpk.go.id/Details/40174/uu-no-11-tahun-2006>.

¹⁴ Hamid Awaluddin, "Why Is Peace in Aceh Successful?," *Accord 20* (2008), online edition, account of the factors of success, <https://www.c-r.org/accord/aceh-indonesia/why-peace-aceh-successful>; M. Nur Djuli and Nurdin Abdul Rahman, "The Helsinki Negotiations: A Perspective from Free Aceh Movement Negotiators," *Accord 20* (2008), online edition, account of the compromise on self-government and local parties, <https://www.c-r.org/accord/aceh-indonesia/helsinki-negotiations-perspective-free-aceh-movement-negotiators>.

security monitoring and in the forum for handling incidents.¹⁵ This finding supports the assessment that part of the relations of power was converted into examinable procedures. Those procedures, however, are not a literal equivalent of the phrase to refer back to God and the Messenger. Their evaluative value lies in the restraint of unilateral action and the availability of a means to resolve disagreements. The measurability of disarmament also explains why success in security can be demonstrated more readily than change in justice, which requires a longer institutional process.

Institutional change did not proceed as a wholly identical translation. Point 1.1.2 of the MoU provides for consultation with and the consent of Aceh for certain categories of decision; Article 8 of the Law on the Governing of Aceh uses the formulation of consultation with, and consideration by, the DPRA or the governor. Bernhard May examines this change together with the problem of the division of authority and the tension between the aspiration for self-government and the construction of national law.¹⁶ That difference matters because the right to give consideration is not the same as the right to give consent. Yet this reading must not yield the conclusion that all central-government authority was abolished by the MoU, or that every difference in formulation automatically nullifies the whole agreement. The defensible result is more specific: political accommodation leaves room for dispute over who must be heard, how much weight their view carries, and how objections are handled. At this point the trust of peace demands attention to the procedure and the reasons for a decision, not merely a declaration of fidelity to the agreement.

Asymmetry is also visible on the agenda of justice. The MoU provides for the establishment of a Human Rights Court and a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, whereas Article 228(1) of the Law on the Governing of Aceh frames the jurisdiction of the human rights court in Aceh as covering violations occurring after the law's promulgation. Article 229 governs the establishment of the KKR. Faisal Hadi's analysis situates these limitations within the problem of victims' access in the early phase of the peace.¹⁷ The prospective provision of Article 228 must not be read as evidence that all other legal avenues for prior events are closed; that conclusion would require examination of a broader body of law. What can be shown is that the existence of the promise of a court and the framing of its

¹⁵ Government of the Republic of Indonesia and Free Aceh Movement, *Memorandum of Understanding* (Helsinki, August 15, 2005), point 1.2.1 and section 4–6, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2004_2009/documents/dv/mou_aceh/mou_acehen.pdf; Republic of Indonesia, Law No. 11 of 2006, article 75; Kirsten E. Schulze, "A Sensitive Mission: Monitoring Aceh's Agreement," *Accord 20* (2008), online edition, "Dealing with Combatants", <https://www.c-r.org/accord/aceh-indonesia/sensitive-mission-monitoring-acehs-agreement>.

¹⁶ Government of Indonesia and Free Aceh Movement, *Memorandum*, point 1.1.2(b)–(d); Republic of Indonesia, Law No. 11 of 2006, article 8; Bernhard May, "The Law on the Governing of Aceh: The Way Forward or a Source of Conflicts?," *Accord 20* (2008), online edition, "Further Deviations", <https://www.c-r.org/accord/aceh-indonesia/law-governing-aceh-way-forward-or-source-conflicts>.

¹⁷ Government of Indonesia and Free Aceh Movement, *Memorandum*, point 2.2–2.3; Republic of Indonesia, Law No. 11 of 2006, article 228–229; Faisal Hadi, "Human Rights and Justice in Aceh: The Long and Winding Road," *Accord 20* (2008), online edition, account of the obstacles to justice, <https://www.c-r.org/accord/aceh-indonesia/human-rights-and-justice-aceh-long-and-winding-road>.

jurisdiction do not by themselves answer the needs of the victims of the earlier conflict. This difference underscores the value of separating the levels of norm, design, and outcome: the recognition of justice within a document is evidence of commitment, whereas access and redress require additional evidence.

Table 2. Promises and institutional formulations compared

Issue	Helsinki MoU 2005	Law on the Governing of Aceh 2006	Evaluative implication
Participation	Point 1.2.1: facilitation of local parties.	Article 75: formation of local parties.	A channel exists; the quality of the competition requires further evidence.
Relations between the center and Aceh	Point 1.1.2(b)–(d): consultation and consent.	Article 8: consultation and consideration.	The weight of involvement is not identical.
Human Rights Court	Point 2.2: establishment of a human rights court.	Article 228: violations after promulgation.	The formulation does not automatically address cases from the conflict period.
Truth	Point 2.3: establishment of a truth and reconciliation commission.	Article 229: establishment of the KKR in Aceh.	Establishment, operation, and redress must be distinguished.

Source: the authors' reading of the references described in the relevant sections.

Elite accommodation and the rights of citizens

The transformation from a rebel organization into a participant in governance brings both possibilities and new risks. Aspinall's analysis of the 2006 elections shows variation in local support and internal divisions within GAM; a subsequent report examines how compromise and elite interests can sustain the durability of the peace. From another angle, Afridal Darmi shows that civil-society organizations also worked within the peace process and the drafting of post-conflict arrangements, even though their capacity for engagement was not equal to that of the armed parties.¹⁸ For that reason, the people of Aceh should not be treated as a single subject whose every interest is fully represented by the central government and GAM. That finding produces a shift in the target of evaluation: after

¹⁸ Edward Aspinall, "Elections: Consolidating Peace," *Accord 20* (2008), online edition, "Patterns of Voter Support" and "Looking Forward", <https://www.c-r.org/accord/aceh-indonesia/elections-consolidating-peace>; Aspinall, *Elite Bargains*, discussion of elite bargains; Afridal Darmi, "Civil Society Engagement in the Peace Process," *Accord 20* (2008), online edition, account of civil-society engagement, <https://www.c-r.org/accord/aceh-indonesia/civil-society-engagement-peace-process>.

accommodation, the question of trust applies to local power as well. The origins of the struggle may explain a leader's political capital, but they cannot substitute for scrutiny of how he allocates benefits, responds to criticism, and guarantees the rights of citizens who are not his supporters.

The difference between reintegration and reparation shows concretely who may be left behind in the peace. Frödin explains the problem of targeting and the distribution of assistance; Kamaruzzaman highlights the gap between women's work for peace and their formal access. The 2015 joint open letter of Amnesty International and human rights organizations demanded truth, justice, and reparations, including attention to survivors of sexual violence.¹⁹ That picture needs updating: the 2024 Peulara Damèe plain guide describes the establishment of the Aceh KKR in 2016 and the publication of the full findings report in December 2023. That guide declares itself an unofficial abridged version compiled by accompanying organizations; this article does not treat it as the complete official text of the KKR.²⁰ These developments refute the narrative that there has been no progress in the disclosure of truth. Yet the existence of a commission and a report is not identical to the implementation of all recommendations for redress or judicial accountability. Careful assessment must be able to acknowledge progress while sustaining the question of its outcomes for victims.

Discussion

The findings above establish post-accommodation accountability as a relationship between political acceptance and continuing obligation. The term refers to the obligation of those who hold power after a peace compromise to explain their decisions, to submit to scrutiny, and to redress harm within the scope of their authority. Its textual basis is the limitation of human commands together with the responsibility of trust; its institutional form is a contemporary reconstruction that must be justified in its own right. This framework does not assert that a ruler must be perfect for each of his actions to be valid. It rejects a more specific error, namely turning the recognition of an office into blanket approval of an official's actions. That separation yields a position distinct from both the absolute justification of the state and the romanticization of former rebels. Once a person acquires public authority, the historical legitimacy of his struggle does not diminish his obligation to treat citizens justly. The demand for obedience is thus always confronted by the question of the content of a command and the discharge of responsibility.

¹⁹ Frödin, "The Challenges of Reintegration", discussion of reintegration targeting; Kamaruzzaman, "Agents for Change", discussion of women's access; Amnesty International et al., *Indonesia: Justice, Truth and Reparations for Victims of the Aceh Conflict, Ten Years On: Open Letter*, ASA 21/2267/2015 (August 13, 2015), 1–3, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa21/2267/2015/en/>.

²⁰ Asia Justice and Rights, KontraS Aceh, LBH Aceh, and PASKA, *Peulara Damèe: Nurturing Peace—Findings Report of the Aceh Truth and Reconciliation Commission: A Plain Guide*, 1st ed. (August 2024), 1–2, 8–11, <https://asia-ajar.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Peulara-Damee-A-Plain-Guide.pdf>.

That framework operates through a distinction among three levels of assessment. At the level of norms, the analysis determines the principles genuinely supported by the text and its interpretive tradition. At the institutional level, the analysis examines the authority, the party bearing the obligation, the procedures, and the avenues of objection established by the documents. At the level of implementation, the analysis examines access, decisions, the distribution of benefits, and demonstrable follow-up. Failure at one level is not necessarily the same as failure at another: inadequate institutions do not abolish the value of a principle, and a sound principle does not prove that an institution works. In Aceh, the widening of participation may be acknowledged as an achievement even as the weight of consultation remains contested; progress in the search for truth may be acknowledged without concluding that all victims' rights have been fulfilled. That distinction spares the evaluation from a binary choice between peace that has wholly succeeded and peace that has wholly failed. It also makes criticism more precise, because it names the obligation, the forum, and the evidence that still require examination.

An objection worth considering is that the pressure of accountability may burden a fragile compromise. The reports on the preservation of order within the exegetical corpus make this risk impossible to ignore. The Aceh literature likewise shows the importance of political incentives and elite involvement for stabilization. Yet acknowledging an order of priorities is not identical to granting an open-ended release from responsibility. Normatively, the ending of war is a reason to design implementable stages, not a reason to abolish the rights of parties who did not take part in the negotiations. Institutionally, phased arrangements can be distinguished from indefinite postponement only where there is a responsible party, information on developments, an opportunity to raise objections, and follow-up that can be examined. This article offers those four elements as criteria of evaluation, not as a report that they have been met in Aceh. In this way, concern for order is preserved, while the language of stability does not become a justification for closing off questions about power and about harm not yet redressed.

Bangsamoro offers a comparator on how recognition of a community must contend with the diversity within it. Republic Act No. 11054 places transitional justice, reparation for unjust dispossession, the rights of indigenous peoples, and freedom of religion within Article IX. The provisions on non-Moro indigenous peoples show that recognition of the Bangsamoro must not erase those who are not fully represented by the region's majority identity.²¹ Its comparative implication for Aceh is not to copy the Philippine parliamentary design or categories of identity. What can be learned is the evaluative principle that a group's success in obtaining autonomy does not automatically guarantee the freedom and standing of all residents under its authority. The conception of trust directed toward citizens must reach parties who differ in ethnicity, political choice, experience of the conflict, or

²¹ Republic of the Philippines, *Republic Act No. 11054* (July 27, 2018), The Lawphil Project, Article IX, Sections 1–5, https://lawphil.net/statutes/repacts/ra2018/ra_11054_2018.html.

proximity to the elite. At the level of analysis, this shifts the focus from a group's victory in representation to the limits on the use of power once that representation has been obtained.

The comparison sharpens when legal design is separated from evidence of implementation. Gulakova and Pangcoga's evaluation of the European Union's engagement program in Mindanao notes weaknesses in the results framework and inadequate attention to former women combatants and to ethnic and religious minorities. Its recommendations stress conflict analysis, coordination, and the integration of a gender perspective.²² Because its object is a particular program, that finding does not prove that the whole of Bangsamoro governance has failed. It does, however, reveal a problem of demonstration that is also relevant to Aceh: the number of activities, the institutions established, or the funds allocated is not enough to explain change in citizens' access and safety. To operationalize trust empirically, further research must trace who receives benefits, who goes unrecorded, the reasons for refusal, and the capacity to contest decisions. In this way, cross-regional dialogue does not stop at a shared autonomy; it improves the way one assesses the relationship among political promises, program instruments, and the outcomes experienced by different groups.

Northern Ireland reveals another limit of generalization. The Belfast Agreement recognizes the principle of consent regarding the region's status and provides for shared institutions, rights, and protections across communities. Helsinki, by contrast, situates the resolution of Aceh within the unitary state of Indonesia; the two constitutional architectures cannot be equated.²³ Yet the study by O'Connell, Ní Aoláin, and Malagón shows that institutional change and elite accommodation can still coexist with weak implementation of the promise of equality. They also stress the work of civil society in sustaining the demands written into the agreement.²⁴ The lesson for the analysis of Aceh is that compliance with an agreement cannot be judged solely by the continuity of the government produced by the compromise. Citizens' ability to use that commitment to demand change is a dimension of its own. This comparison supports the critical function of an ethic of trust, but it does not prove that Northern Ireland's institutional order was derived from, or vindicates the truth of, any Qur'anic interpretation.

Desirée Nilsson's comparative research broadens the basis for discussing inclusion. In her summary of a study of 83 agreements from 40 civil wars, the involvement of civil society is associated with the durability of peace. That measure of durability, however, centers on the non-recurrence of armed conflict between the signatories, not on every

²² Gulakova and Pangcoga, *Evaluation*, 34–36.

²³ Government of the United Kingdom and Government of Ireland, *The Agreement Reached in the Multi-Party Negotiations* (Belfast, April 10, 1998), CAIN archive, Ulster University, "Constitutional Issues," para. 1, and "Strand One," para. 5, <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/events/peace/docs/agreement.htm>; Government of Indonesia and Free Aceh Movement, *Memorandum*, preamble.

²⁴ O'Connell, Ní Aoláin, and Malagón, "The Belfast/Good Friday Agreement", section 3.5 and 4.

dimension of social justice.²⁵ For that reason, the result must not be converted into a claim that the presence of civil-society organizations always produces justice, or that all organizations represent citizens equally. Its relevance lies in broadening the subject of peace beyond those who hold arms. Read together with Aceh, Bangsamoro, and Northern Ireland, inclusion must be understood as the capacity to influence decisions and to demand explanations, not merely an invitation to attend activities. The framework of post-accommodation accountability gains depth from that distinction: what is assessed is not only whether a group is present, but whether it can demand the discharge of obligations and obtain a response that can be tested.

The article's contribution to exegetical studies lies in the way it preserves the distinction between inherited meaning and proposed application. The reading does not stop at an inventory of who the *ulil amri* are, but neither does it attribute constitutional democracy, modern reparation, or international monitoring to exegetes who did not discuss them. The text supplies a moral limit, while contemporary reasoning tests how that limit is realized in institutions. Its contribution to peace studies is to treat religious language as a source of questions about responsibility that can enter into dialogue with evidence, rather than as a final stamp upon the success of a negotiation. In both fields the same standard applies: claims must be commensurate with evidence. Criticism of the abuse of authority does not require the conclusion that all authority is illegitimate; recognition of the success of a peace does not require the denial of injustice. A relationship of this kind allows exegesis to play a part in public criticism while still acknowledging the plurality of citizens and the limits of political representation.

The limits of this study affect the scope of its conclusions. A corpus of five Sunni exegeses does not represent all schools, the jurisprudence of rebellion, or Indonesian interpretation. The Aceh sources rest heavily on analyses of the early phase of the peace and on documentary reports; the KKR guide adds a more recent development but is not a substitute for examination of the complete official report or of its follow-up data. The regional comparison is directed and does not control variables so as to yield causal conclusions. Moreover, there are no data proving how former combatants, religious scholars, officials, or victims receive the ethical reconstruction offered here. Further research must test that reception through interviews and readings of local documents, while also tracing several decisions or redress programs from the basis of authority through to their outcomes for citizens. That proposal is not a hidden condition for vindicating the present findings; it marks the difference between the interpretive contribution already produced and the empirical questions not yet answered.

²⁵ Desirée Nilsson, "Civil Society in Peace Accords and the Durability of Peace," *Accord 25* (2014), online edition, account of the definition of inclusion and the durability of peace, <https://www.c-r.org/accord/legitimacy-and-peace-processes/introduction-legitimacy-and-peace-processes/legitimacy-and-2>.

Conclusion

The limits of obedience to the ulil amri can be formulated into a framework for evaluating the Aceh peace, provided that the refusal of a sinful command, the moral assessment of governance, and the act of replacing those in power are firmly distinguished. The exegetical corpus examined places trust (amanah) and justice alongside the obligation of obedience and a concern for order. It supports the rejection of the ruler's moral immunity, but it does not furnish an automatic justification for separatism or for every form of armed resistance. Applying that principle to Aceh shows that political accommodation must be assessed together with the obligations of authority that arise thereafter. The widening of political channels and the monitoring of security are meaningful changes; the differences in the framing of authority and the needs of victims show that the significance of those changes cannot be settled merely by pointing to the signing of an agreement.

The framework of post-accommodation accountability therefore distinguishes norms, institutional design, and implementation, and applies accountability to both the central government and local elites according to their authority. The dialogue with Bangsamoro and Northern Ireland underscores the importance of examining the standing of non-dominant groups and the capacity of civil society to demand the discharge of obligations. The disclosure of truth through the Aceh KKR should be acknowledged as a development, without being equated with the completion of redress and accountability. The article's conclusion is evaluative, not a causal explanation of the emergence of Helsinki: the peace becomes an object of trust that is continually tested through the way power is used, objections are processed, and the rights of citizens are fulfilled after the parties to the conflict have obtained a place in governance.

Declarations

Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI)

The authors used ChatGPT/Codex by OpenAI as a technical aid for language editing, manuscript structural refinement, and sentence reformulation. AI was not used to generate research data. All references, substantive descriptions, and interpretations presented in the manuscript were reviewed and independently verified by the authors. AI is not listed as an author; full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, academic integrity, and final content of the manuscript rests with the authors.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest related to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this manuscript.

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